

## **"THE SCIENCE OF LIBRARIANSHIP."**

By

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Foreword—The (English) "Library Association Record" for August-September, 1917, prints an address made at the opening of the Summer School of Library Service of the University of Wales at Aberystwyth, on July 31, 1917, by Sir William Osler, Bart., M. D., F. R. S., Regius Professor of Medicine, Oxford, a Curator of the Bodleian, and President of the Bibliographical Society. Those who remember the great interest he took while in Baltimore in the Libraries of the Johns Hopkins Hospital and of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty will not be surprised that he has continued that interest and that his advice is valuable as to the training of librarians and the conduct of libraries. The most important portions of this address are as follows:

"Within the last few years the work has been so organized that we may speak of a science of librarianship. The old rule-of-thumb order which each custodian of a collection of books adopted, as his own knowledge or ignorance suggested, is giving place to carefully thought-out methods of arrangement designed to make the books of greater service, and more easily accessible. The librarians of today, and it will be true still more of the librarians of tomorrow, are not fiery dragons interposed between the people and the books. They are useful public servants, who manage libraries in the interest of the public. The old notion of the right person to have charge of books is going, but by no means gone; the sooner it goes the better for everybody. Many think still that a great reader, or a writer of books, will make an excellent librarian. This is pure fallacy. . . .

"Between the years 1855, roughly, and the present, there has grown up in Britain and America libraries of a type altogether different from anything existing before—the libraries of the people, public libraries, sometimes miscalled free libraries, brought into existence by the will of the people, maintained by funds derived from the rates. These libraries are firmly established as a factor in promoting education and culture, besides serving many other useful purposes. They are in many places highly organized contributors to the general welfare, but their potential place in the scheme of things intellectual has not been grasped as yet in Britain. Perhaps it is because too much has been done for the people, who have not in this matter worked out their own salvation. Mr. Carnegie and his Trust have spent on library buildings in the United Kingdom more than two millions sterling. In America the function of the public library is better understood than it is here. Why is this? . . .

"America has gone further than we in the matter of technical training. Library schools have been in operation for many years,

and their graduates in large numbers have found employment. In this country the Library Association has laboured with praiseworthy zeal to set up standards of proficiency, to establish classes for instruction, and to test by means of examinations the qualifications of candidates. . . .

"Let us glance for a moment at the subjects. What librarian or assistant can hope to deal with books without a good knowledge of literary history, not merely of his own, but of other countries? . . .

"Bibliography, next in order, is sub-divided by the Library Association into Historical Bibliography, Practical Bibliography, and Book Selection. How many people would be able to pass even an elementary test in either of the first two sub-divisions, or even to define them. Many cataloguers (of sorts) describe themselves as bibliographers, thereby displaying their ignorance of terms, and of the whole subject.

Bibliography deals with the history of printing, the evolution of the printed book from the manuscripts, paper, bookbinding, book illustration, authors, publishers, booksellers, the collation and description of books, the various methods of book production; while book selection is concerned with the type of books suitable to the needs of the people who are to use the library. To do this efficiently requires wide knowledge of books of reference—bibliographies—practical experience, and sound judgment. . . .

"Next in order is Classification, the application of which to collections of books is comparatively recent, and the outcome of modern experience. By it the library is made an organized instrument of service, like a well-trained and disciplined army. For just as hundreds of thousands or even millions of men without proper organizations form a mere mob, so a library without classification is nothing more than a mob of books. Catalogues lessen the confusion, but every catalogue is out of date as soon as it appears, and the reader becomes dependent upon his own and the librarian's memory for the latest books on his subject. With classification, however, this difficulty disappears. The books are sorted to their proper place as they come in. If one wishes to study 'Cancer,' for example, or 'Poultry-keeping,' or any other subject, a properly classified library would be of infinitely greater help than any catalogue, and more expeditious. . . .

"The Library of Congress started reorganization some years ago, a heroic thing to undertake with such large collections, and the re-classification has occupied a special staff for over seventeen years. It is now approaching completion, and incidentally has produced the soundest and most practical scheme of classification yet given to the world, known as the Library of Congress Classification. . . .

"Following the subjects in the order of the Syllabus of the Library Association we come to Cataloguing, an important branch of the work, but not, as many people suppose, the most important.

The widely prevalent idea that library work is made up of cataloguing and that beyond compiling catalogues the staff is mainly engaged in reading and writing books is very wide of the truth. Valuable as is a catalogue it can be of little use unless the books have first been arranged in an order which will enable them to be found when called for, and returned to their places when done with. The classifier in fact must precede the cataloguer, or the labor will be wasted. . . .

"At this point we take leave of the Syllabus of the Library Association and come to two branches of a librarian's equipment which have been rather neglected in this country. On the Continent the Archivist is an important personage. He is going to be important here. We welcome, therefore, the addition of Archives as a subject for study in this Summer School. . . .

"The course of instruction in bookbinding will be a useful auxiliary to the study of Archives, as in addition to bookbinding in its usual forms, instruction and demonstrations will be given in cleaning, repairing, and preserving documents, rare books and valuable manuscripts.

"It is not a little strange, it is indeed a singular anomaly, that our universities, whose chief function is to train men to influence others, do little or nothing directly for the education of those great teachers of the nation, the masters of the elementary schools, and the purveyors of knowledge called librarians. . . .

"A collection of books is, as Carlyle says, a university, and a custodian of books is necessarily a teacher. Post-graduate education is largely in the hands of libraries. Take in illustration my own experience of the past ten days. In a complicated and unusual type of war-shock case, about which I asked my own books in vain, the answer was easily found in the Royal Society of Medicine Library. About a Cambridge University medical diploma, 1683, I bothered my teachers at Bodley, at Cambridge, and at the British Museum. An early, possibly unknown, edition of the "Malade Imaginaire" led me far afield beyond the Taylorian Institution. The British Museum and Bodley are themselves Universities as great as Oxford and Cambridge. The London Library possibly helps the education of more people than London University. . . .

"The Library is everywhere becoming one of the great factors in our educational system, and the director is perforce a teacher of wide and critical influence. How shall he be trained so as best to utilize his opportunities for the public good? No man in the community requires a more comprehensive and thorough education. All knowledge is his province. A common tap for the waters of wisdom, he should not perhaps know everything, but he should know where everything may be found. The parson, the doctor, the lawyer, the engineer, the farmer, the worker in every craft should be able to go to him with full assurance that he will be able to help. The Apocalyptic literature, the recent theories of immunity, the law of war claims, submarine engineering, the chemistry of dyes,

the metallurgy of nickel steel, the story of aviation, the laws of trajectories should be as familiar to him as the 'best sellers' among the novels or the most popular of the war poets. He is the badly salaried intellect of the community and, if fortunate enough to be able to suffer fools gladly, he leads a life of surprising usefulness. And let us not forget other important qualifications—an ability to manage a business as complicated as a department shop, and a knowledge of men and a gift of manners that will enable him to drive his Committee or Council without strain on bit or rein. As Mr. Tedder remarked in a recent address, 'The Librarian in Relation to Books,' 'The model librarian must be two-sided—at once a man of business, and a man of learning and reflection.'

"I should like to see added to the schools of at least one University in each division of the Kingdom a School of the Book, in all its relations historical, technical and commercial—every aspect of bibliography, every detail of typography, every possible side of bibliopoly. And the Press should be included, as the daily paper is nothing but a glorified broadside. The opportunities exist, as the great library furnishes a laboratory, the college with the library staff supervise the courses, and a University Press subserves the typographical side of the training. . . .

"In America the Library School has been a great boon, and has been the means of furnishing highly trained men and women who have, within my knowledge, completely changed the atmosphere of the libraries. I have seen the Surgeon-General's Library, the College of Physicians, Philadelphia, the Boston Medical Library, the McGill Medical Library, to mention only those in which I have been personally interested, grow from small beginnings to collections of national importance. The most striking bibliographical contrast in my own collection is the tiny octavo of 32 pages, the first catalogue, 1865, of the Surgeon-General's Library, Washington, alongside of the 36 folio volumes of the first and second series just completed. The stimulus of trained specialists has been a potent factor in this development. . . .

"Modified to meet local conditions the scheme of the National School would be as follows:

- I. Organization—Control jointly by a Committee representing the Library, the Press, the University, and the Colleges.
- II. Staff—(a) Permanent. The heads of the Library and of the Press, and the assistants in special departments, who would supervise the technical work.
  - (b) Lecturers on library economics, history, bibliography, publishing, binding, etc., chosen partly from the library, partly from the college staffs.
  - (c) Special lecturers from outside, as you have arranged for this Summer School. Publishers, manufacturers, printers, and inventors would be asked to give special lectures.

- III. Students—(a) Ordinary undergraduates, who would be given instruction in (i) the use of the library; (ii) the elements of bibliography; (iii) palaeography.
- (b) Special students: (i) in library work; (ii) in newspaper work, printing, publishing, binding and illustrating.

The school in these departments would offer practical training quite as important as in other technical subjects. For a time at least the courses in library economics may have to be given in a Summer School, but to fit men for the higher library posts we should look forward to an advanced course of two years' post-graduate work.

- (c) Research students. One of the chief functions of the school would be to train men and women in methods of literary and historical research. Tutorial classes and private instruction should be offered in all departments. The National Library with its unique collections should become the Mecca for Celtic students from all parts of the world for whom skilled assistance should be provided by the best scholars.

- IV. The Public—The classes in bibliography should be open. Anyone desiring special instruction in any matter relating to a book from the preparation of manuscripts to the designing of a book cover, should be able to find it at the school. In the great working centres of South Wales extension classes would be held for working men dealing with the book as a tool of the mind.

"And in connection with the Press there would be organized a typographical museum in which would be displayed by models, etc., everything relating to the art of printing—a place in which the historical evolution could be 'studied from the Chinese movable type to the latest linotype machine.' . . .

"Your business is that of purveyors, universal providers of the mental food of the public; and not only are you caterers but you will often be called upon to do the work of cooks and doctors. The majority of mankind, as Burke says, providence has doomed to live on trust, a trust less in you, I fear, than in the ephemeral literature of the day. It is not often that one has a vivid, enduring impression of a newspaper article; but one day in October, 1872, in a Tottenham Court Road tea-shop, I read in 'The Times' a statement of Ruskin to the effect that no mind could resist for a year the dulling influence of the daily paper. Doubtless as an exclusive dietary the press and the magazine do lead to mental conditions the counterpart of what we know in the body as the deficiency diseases, scurvy, rickets, etc. The Library through you supplies the vitamins which counteract the mental lethargy and anaemia which come from too exclusive use of Northcliff and other patent foods."

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